

## **Be Firewise Part 3**

### **Is your Landscape Fire Resistant?**

Living in South Dakota's beautiful countryside can be both exciting and relaxing. The changing seasons with wildlife at your backdoor can be breathtaking. Then again, a wildfire at your backdoor can also be "breathtaking" but not in the same way. This is not the side of nature you want to experience unprepared.

The South Dakota Wildland Fire Division (SDWF) is again reminding rural landowners to be Firewise by using rural wisdom to keep your property fire resistant. Be aware that fires in rural and forested areas are hard to control and cannot be handled in the same manner as city fires. Usually rural homes are many miles from a fire station. In many rural fire departments there are fewer firefighters available than in city fire departments, and usually these firefighters are volunteers. Volunteer firefighters leave their jobs to respond to a fire, this adds extra reaction time to the emergency call, allowing the fire to spread. Properties that have not been maintained properly complicate the hazard. The solution to this dilemma is in your hands, literally. When you take the time and energy to make your property fire-resistant, you reduce the risk of a fire starting or one spreading to your home. Your preparation may not only save your property and family, but your community as well.

Making your surroundings fire safe does not have to cost money, just a small investment of time. The objective is to limit flammable vegetation and materials surrounding the home, and lower the risk of catastrophic fire on your property. Get some friends and neighbors together and help each other make improvements. Everyone has something at stake and it will make the work easy and enjoyable.

In "Be Firewise Part 2, Wildland/Urban Landscape" steps were given to help you prepare your property and buildings against an unexpected wildfire. By now you should be making strides in preparing your property. Please use the following checklist to reassess your property's needs.

#### **1. The buildings and the 30 foot zone surrounding the house:**

- Remove all dead leaves and pine needles from the landscape, gutters, and under the deck.
- Remove limbs that hang over the house and/or within 10 feet of your home – they are flammable and they drop debris which can easily catch a spark.
- Install 1/8<sup>th</sup> metal screening on all chimney, attic, fascia, and any other venting or openings that are a direct access to your home's interior to prevent embers entering the building.
- Keep trees spaced no less than 30 feet apart at the crowns.
- Move any stacked firewood or propane tanks to at least 30 feet from the house. Keep areas around these areas clean and clear of flammable debris.
- Landscape with materials that are nonflammable, such as rock, non-bark mulch, annuals, high-moisture perennials. Pathways, driveways, and open lawns can be used as firebreaks.

- Make sure the house numbers are at least four inches tall and easily visible.
- Carefully space low-growing plants or trim and shape overgrown plants.
- Mow the grass no higher than four inches and maintain regularly.
- Prune trees so that the lowest limbs are at least 10 feet above ground.
- Prune branches overhanging the driveway to a 14 foot overhead clearance for emergency vehicles.
- Plan and practice an escape route with your family and pets.
- Place fire extinguishers in the kitchen, garage, and machine sheds; keep them properly maintained.

**2. Move to the next zone, 30 to 100 feet from your home.**

- Keep trees in this area spaced no less than 25 feet at the crowns. Try to mix deciduous and coniferous trees.
- Again, trim tree branches at least 10 feet above ground and remove woody debris.
- Do not use a burn barrel for trash or yard debris. Start a compost pile instead.
- Create firebreaks such as driveways, gravel walkways, and open lawns.
- Make sure driveways are at least 12 feet wide for emergency vehicles; driveways with sharp curves need to be 20 feet wide.

**3. Now move to the zone that is 100 to 300 feet from the home.**

- Thin out the vegetation, with trees an actual spacing of 25 feet at the crowns.
- Remove heavy accumulations of woody debris such as wood piles or brush piles.
- Remove low hanging branches to at least 10 feet from the ground to eliminate ladder fuels that will spread fire up into the tree's canopy.
- If the driveway is longer than 150 feet, provide a turn-around for emergency vehicles.
- Install visible house numbers and/or 911 address at the entrance of the driveway using nonflammable building materials.
- For easy visibility, keep vegetation trimmed around the entrance to your property.

Do not let an unexpected wildfire destroy your reason for living in the country. Be rural wise. Be firewise. Take the time and effort to make your property safe so that you can relax and enjoy the breathtaking beautiful South Dakota landscape. Your investment is in your hands.

Thank you to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for providing the Firewise on the Farm information.